Eating Disorders Essay, Research Paper

Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are mental disorders that can have serious physical complications. These disorders may make normal functioning difficult and can become chronic, crippling illnesses and in extreme cases require hospitalization. There are two main types of eating disorders: Anorexia and Bulimia. These are complex disorders focusing on issues of eating, body weight, and body shape.

People who intentionally starve themselves suffer from an eating disorder called anorexia nervosa. The disorder, which usually begins in young people around the time of puberty, involves extreme weight loss, at least 15 percent below the individual’s normal body weight. Many people with the disorder look withered, but are convinced they are overweight. Even after losing the unwanted weight they continue to starve themselves believing they are still obese. Sometimes they must be hospitalized to prevent starvation.

People with bulimia nervosa consume large amounts of food and then rid their bodies of the excess calories by vomiting, abusing laxatives or diuretics, taking enemas, or exercising obsessively. Some use a combination of all these forms of purging. Because many individuals with bulimia “binge and purge” in secret and maintain normal or above normal body weight, they can often successfully hide their problem from others for years.

There are three main areas that, in combination, likely cause most people’s eating disorders. These areas include personality factors, genetics and the environment, and biochemistry. Most people with eating disorders share certain personality traits: low self-esteem, feelings of helplessness, and a fear of becoming fat. In anorexia and bulimia, eating behaviours seem to develop as a way of handling stress and anxieties.

People with anorexia tend to be “too good to be true.” They rarely disobey, keep their feelings to themselves, and tend to be perfectionists, good students, and excellent athletes. Some researchers believe that people with anorexia restrict food to gain a sense of control in some area of their lives. Having followed the wishes of others for the most part, they have not learned how to cope with the problems typical of adolescence, growing up, and becoming independent. Controlling their weight appears to offer two advantages, at least initially: they can take control of their bodies and gain approval from others. However, it eventually becomes clear to others that they are out of control and dangerously thin.

People who develop bulimia and binge eating disorder typically consume huge amounts of food, often junk food, to reduce stress and relieve anxiety. With binge eating, however, comes guilt and depression. Purging can bring relief, but it is only temporary. Individuals with bulimia are also impulsive and more likely to engage in risky behaviour, such as abuse of alcohol and drugs.

Eating disorders appear to run in families, with female relatives most often affected. It seems that mothers who are overly concerned about their daughters’ weight and physical attractiveness may put the girls at increased risk of developing an eating disorder. In addition, girls with eating disorders often have a father and brothers who are overly critical of their weight. Biochemistry continues to be investigated as a potential cause as well, with the focus on brain neurotransmitters. Medications can often help to counteract the effects of neurotransmitters, which may be excessive or lacking within the brain.

The first thing to keep in mind is that, as an “outsider” there are many things you cannot do to help a family member or friend to get better. You cannot force an Anorexic to eat, or keep a bulimic from purging. The first thing to realize once you have come to the awareness that your loved-one suffers from an Eating Disorder is that you must not concentrate immediately on the food. All forms of Eating Disorders are emotionally based and the behaviours are only a symptom to emotional and stress related problems. They can t be forced to seek help; it must be something they want to do for themselves. You can support and encourage your loved one, and gently express concern, and the best thing you can do is to learn to attentively listen.

It must be remembered that disordered eating is an attempt to control, hide, stuff, avoid and forget emotional pain, stress and/or self-hate. It is a very serious issue, which can result in cancer, low bread pressure, heart attacks and even death. People need to remember that although obesity can have its health effects, the best way to deal with it is through diets recommended by doctors. There are many alternatives to losing weight, each of which can make a person feel better inside and out.